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ABSTRACT

This study report begins with a profile of marginal learners based on current research. It continues with a question-by-question analysis of a survey which was completed by 22 teachers identified as effective in working with marginal learners. The survey gathered information concerning: (1) teacher descriptions of marginal learners, including student classroom behavior, attitudes, and learning and environmental deficits; (2) qualities of effective teachers of marginal learners, addressing personal qualities and philosophy and instructional strategies; (3) classroom organization, such as seat assignments, instructional groupings, teacher proximity, and classroom procedures; (4) organization of instructional time; (5) learning activities which provide structure and enhance affective development; and (6) specific strategies for concept review, questioning, reinforcement, motivation, self-esteem enhancement, discipline, evaluation, homework, outside class assistance, and parental contact. The report includes a copy of the survey instrument, a bibliography of 83 items, and descriptions of 15 specific instructional activities especially effective with marginal learners. (JDD)

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Drawing Marginal Learners
Into the Big Picture

A Joint Study by

KEA

Kentucky Education Association
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

and

AEL

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Charleston, West Virginia 25325

June 1989

Funded by the

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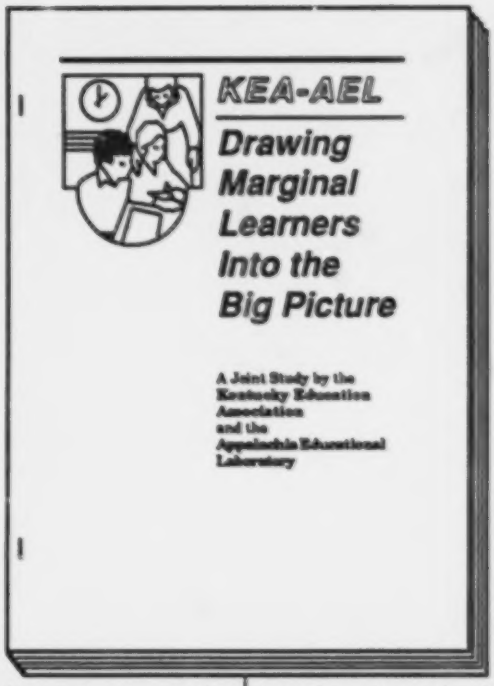
Announcing

Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture

A Joint Study by the
Kentucky Education Association
and the
Appalachia Educational Laboratory

THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITY used with at-risk students provides a graphic example of the plight of marginal students. To begin the activity, students are given blank paper and a pencil and asked to draw a large circle. Using the circle to represent their school, the students are asked to mark where the principal is and label their mark. In like manner, they are asked to place favorite and least favorite teachers and classmates on the page. Finally, the students are asked to place themselves on the page. The resulting drawings are often remarkably telling, bringing to the viewer's awareness the students' perception of their place in school. In most cases, the students place themselves near the margins of the circle—sometimes within, sometimes without.



By placing themselves near the perimeter of the school circles, these young people represent their sense of powerlessness and alienation as students. Often feeling very much like square pegs in round holes, these students are constantly confronted with the fact that their natural style and manner of learning do not fit the "school way." The cumulative experiences of failure resulting from this incongruity have devastating effects on students' belief in themselves as capable learners and worthy human beings.

All teachers surveyed for *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture* were identified as effective in working with marginal learners. Through their responses, they demonstrate why they are effective with marginal learners. **Through philosophical statements and descriptions of teaching practices, they reveal strong convictions that: (a) all students can succeed as learners, (b) success is defined according to each student's abilities, (c) all students have a right to human dignity and respect, and (d) schools are responsible for providing a curriculum and learning environment that allow students to succeed as learners.**

Effective teachers of marginal learners—by constantly seeking learning experiences that will work for all students—communicate respect for marginal learners as individuals and faith in them as learners. These teachers find ways for marginal learners to succeed, slowly drawing them into the learning process. Eventually the students are able to draw themselves as central figures in the school circles. **Instructional activities from teacher contributors are included.**

The purpose of *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture* is to describe specific ways effective teachers of marginal students translate their convictions about students and learning into classroom practice. As fewer students are placed in special education programs and more students are mainstreamed into regular classrooms, the need for guidance on "what works" with marginal learners will become more widespread among classroom teachers. *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture* can help!

To obtain a copy of *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture*, contact:
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Resource Center,
Post Office Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325; (304) 347-0428.
[52 pages, typeset, stapled, $4.50; payment must accompany order.]

Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture

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June 1989

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The survey responses from 26 Kentucky teachers (see Appendix A) nominated as effective with marginal learners are at the core of *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture* and are greatly appreciated. The survey responses were thorough and thoughtful, reflecting a keen insight on the part of respondents into the dilemma of marginal learners and a strong belief that it is the school's responsibility to reach these students. (The survey instrument is included in Appendix B.) In most instances, respondents wrote in the margins, on the back of the pages, or enclosed additional pages. Such enthusiasm and effort in responding to a survey attest to the respondents' dedication. The recommended activities for marginal learners that respondents contributed for Appendix C should become useful tips adopted and adapted by other Kentucky teachers and educators across AEL's Region.

Executive Summary

The following activity used with at-risk students provides a graphic example of the plight of marginal students within a school system. To begin the activity, students are given a piece of blank paper and a pencil and asked to draw a large circle. Using the circle to represent their school, the students are asked to mark where the principal is and label their mark. In like manner, they are asked to place favorite and least favorite teachers and classmates on the page. Finally, the students are asked to place themselves on the page. The resulting drawings by many marginal learners are remarkably telling, bringing to the viewer's awareness the students' perception of their place in school. In most cases, the marks representing the students are found near the margins of the circle—sometimes within, sometimes without.

By placing themselves near the perimeter of the school circles, these young people represent their sense of powerlessness and alienation as students. Often feeling very much like square pegs in round holes, these students are constantly confronted with the fact that their natural style and manner of learning do not fit the "school way." The cumulative experiences of failure resulting from this incongruity have devastating effects on students' belief in themselves as capable learners and worthy human beings.

All teachers surveyed for this document were identified as effective in working with marginal learners. Through their responses, they demonstrate why they are effective with marginal learners. Through philosophical statements and descriptions of teaching practices, they reveal strong convictions that: (a) all students can succeed as learners, (b) success is defined according to each student's abilities, (c) all students have a right to human dignity and respect, and (d) schools are responsible for providing a curriculum and learning environment that allow students to succeed as learners.

Effective teachers of marginal learners—by constantly seeking learning experiences that will work for all students—communicate respect for marginal learners as individuals and faith in them as learners. These teachers find ways for marginal learners to succeed, slowly drawing them into the learning process. Eventually the students are able to draw themselves as central figures in the school circles.

The purpose of this study group product, *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture*, is to identify specific ways effective teachers of marginal students translate their convictions about students and learning into classroom practice. As fewer students are placed in special education programs and more students are mainstreamed into regular classrooms, the need for guidance on "what works" with marginal learners will become more widespread among classroom teachers.

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Readers are requested to complete the product evaluation form included with *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture* and to fold, staple, and return it to AEL. Suggestions for revisions to the document and other AEL study group publications are welcomed.

Introduction

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) seeks to provide professional development opportunities to educators by working with and through their associations. Since 1985, one way that the Classroom Instruction Program has assisted associations is through the creation of study groups. AEL's purpose for establishing a study group is to assist educators in conducting and using research.

A study group is composed of educators who are organized to conduct a study on an educational issue and who produce a product that is useful to their colleagues. Associations and AEL jointly select topics for study groups, although the selection of members is handled by the association. AEL staff participate in meetings as members of the study group and usually take a facilitative role. AEL provides a small grant to assist the study group, but the association or individual members often make in-kind contributions that far exceed AEL's grant. AEL provides additional services, such as editing, layout, and typesetting of the final product.

The responsibility for dissemination lies with both AEL and the association. AEL distributes at cost *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture* through its Resource Center to educators in Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. KEA publicizes and distributes the publication to Kentucky educators upon request.

Background of the Study

The Kentucky Education Association (KEA) and AEL collaborated in their first study group of teachers on *Tips for Teaching Marginal Learners* in 1985-86. Due to a cutback in funding, fewer Kentucky students were to receive the services intended for special education students or exceptional children during the 1986-87 school year and beyond.

Study group members anticipated an increase in mainstreamed special education students. They discussed the dilemma of adequately serving these students along with those lower achievers who had never been identified for special services, yet continue to flounder in the regular curriculum. This first KEA-AEL study group decided that a compendium of suggestions for assisting such marginal learners would be valuable to regular classroom teachers faced with this increase in low achievers.

Study group members drafted a survey requesting that teachers provide descriptions of their most effective strategies for marginal learners, students who fall through the cracks or fail to achieve with regular instructional methods. KEA staff printed the survey and distributed it to delegates to the National Education Association's 1986 Representative Assembly. Over 100 teaching techniques and motivational strategies were gathered from teachers in many states. The techniques and strategies were analyzed for commonalities, which became the sections of the publication developed by group members for teachers who work with marginal learners.

Tips for Teaching Marginal Learners, the product of the 1985-86 KEA-AEL study group, has been widely distributed through the Kentucky Education Association, AEL's Resource Center, and other Regional Educational Laboratories. However, with trends toward fewer special education placements and more mainstreamed students, KEA and AEL staff were interested in providing further assistance to educators who work with students who do not succeed in mastering the regular curriculum. Association staff nominated teachers to a second study group on assistance for marginal learners in 1987.

The second KEA-AEL study group on assis-

tance to marginal learners initially met in June 1987 to outline the study and a product of use to practitioners. The study group invited local KEA affiliate presidents and Instruction and Professional Development (IPD) state committee members to nominate teachers for participation in the survey. Nominees were to be those teachers particularly effective in helping marginal learners achieve. Over 100 teachers were nominated.

In a February 1988 meeting, members of the study group drafted a survey (see Appendix B) that focused on modifications made and strategies used by the nominees to assist marginal learners. Teachers were encouraged to attach descriptions of specific activities especially effective with marginal learners. (These activities are included in Appendix C.) Twenty-six survey responses were received.

Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture, the final study group product, begins with a profile of marginal learners based on current research. The document continues with a question-by-question analysis of survey items, including summaries of each item. Survey items explore such issues as teacher descriptions of marginal learners, qualities of effective teachers of marginal learners, and specific curricular and instructional concerns related to marginal learners.

A Profile of Marginal Learners

Students who fall between the cracks, alienated students, at-risk students, underachievers, slow learners—many terms have been used to describe students who are not succeeding academically or who are not behaving according to the standards and expectations of their teachers, parents, or the school administration. The "hard-to-reach" and often "hard-to-teach" student can be found in every grade, in every school, and in every community. Marginal students are present in every kind of neighborhood or family and at every level of intelligence. Gary Wehlage (1983) points out,

> *...the term "marginal student" does not refer to any set of characteristics based on intelligence or social class. Instead, the category of marginal students includes a broad range...some bright and others less so, who find themselves unsuccessful, unhappy, and even unwelcome in school. (p. 7)*

Until funding decreases limited the number of special education classes and national trends emphasized providing service in the least restrictive environment, many marginal learners might have been assigned to special education classes. Unfortunately, few regular classroom teachers have had training in diagnosing the learning needs of these students or developing instructional strategies for them. Motivating these students is another concern to classroom teachers. Wehlage states:

> *It is not surprising that in a society that honors success, competition, and achievement, some of these students will see themselves, or be perceived by others, as losers....The lack of success in school pulls the marginal student into a downward spiral of negative experiences with teachers, administrators, and parents. (p. 7)*

As schools across the nation address the alarming statistics concerning school dropouts, more attention will be given to keeping students in school. This will add another marginal learner to the regular classroom, a learner who has not identified with or who has openly rejected the traditional range of teachers, courses, and organizational rules.

Other marginal learners are even more difficult to label. These include the "invisible and uninvolved," those who slide by or coast along, the "dropouts who haven't left yet."

Some marginal students eventually drop out, others may complete four years of high school without having graduated, and some may graduate or receive a diploma or G.E.D. through adult education programs. Whatever their level of achievement when they leave school, "this group...gains little from the formal system of...education, and most of them acquire a negative attitude about formal education" (Wehlage, 1983, p. 8).

Today's teachers face the challenge of meeting the instructional needs of many students classified as "marginal learners." Because of the diversity of this population, many teachers need assistance in knowing how best to serve them. Those teachers who have demonstrated their ability to work with marginal learners have much to share with other educators. The remainder of this document centers on the survey responses of Kentucky teachers designated as effective in teaching marginal learners.

Survey Analysis

Survey questions are highlighted in this section, along with the input of the 22 respondents. An analysis of responses follows each question to identify commonalities among responses and recurring themes. Particular responses that offer a unique insight to the issue under consideration are included as appropriate.

Question 1:

Imagine a marginal learner in your class. What characteristics make him or her marginal?

Marginal learners are those students who could be successful in the regular classroom, but are not. They have no defining physical characteristics, nor are they all from the same social, economic, religious, or ethnic background. However, teacher descriptions of marginal learners in the survey responses for this question can be categorized into three domains. They are student classroom behaviors, learning and environmental deficits, and student attitudes.

Student Classroom Behavior

Teacher descriptions of marginal learner characteristics were predominantly behavioral descriptions, since social behaviors, work habits, and academic performance are obvious and measurable.

Some teachers surveyed reported that marginal students experience more difficulty with interpersonal relationships than students who are functioning more successfully in the regular classroom. Teachers described two types of social interaction that they observed in marginal learners. One type of behavior is disruptive, distracting, aggressive, and combative. The other is more passive; students behave as observers of classroom activities, rather than active participants. Both types of behaviors are seen by teachers as attention-seeking behaviors. Disruptive behaviors demand the attention of the teacher and classmates, even though the attention is usually negative and controlling. The passive behaviors of slow workers also demand attention. Their work may be incomplete or not done at all. They ask for additional directions and special help that make more demands on the teacher's time.

Teachers described work habits that are characteristic of marginal learners. Distractibility is common among these students, accompanied by a short attention span and difficulty in concentration. Several respondents described marginal learners as disorganized both in their thinking and in their study habits. These characteristics have a negative impact on the academic performance of marginal learners. They appear to be unable to learn at the same rate as successful students; their grades often range between average and failing marks. The majority of teachers in the survey reported that marginal learners need more learning props, and they learn concrete facts more readily than abstract concepts.

Learning and Environmental Deficits

Survey data indicate two areas of deficiency that students encounter in their efforts to learn. The most frequently mentioned area of deficiency is that of basic skills development. The other, more subtle deficiency is the inability of the family to provide an educationally supportive environment.

Teachers noted that marginal learners may

show evidence of making a real effort to complete assignments, but a basic skills deficit may impede their success and prevent them from achieving the status of independent learners. Inadequate skills in communication, comprehension, arithmetic, thinking, reading, memory, listening, and studying can create complex learning problems. Deficits in fundamental skills inhibit acquisition of new skills and transfer of skills from one content area to another.

Some teachers indicated that marginal learners need the combined support of school and home intervention to break the pattern of failure. However, the home environment of many marginal learners may not be educationally supportive or equipped to deal with such problems. Teachers observed in survey data that regular school attendance is not strongly encouraged in some marginal students' homes, and, for some, academic failure is passively accepted as a norm of performance.

Student Attitudes

In describing characteristics of marginal learners, teachers often mentioned student attitudes about themselves and learning. Marginal learners, as perceived by most of the teachers surveyed, passively accept academic failure as a part of school performance. Their attitudes toward learning are described by some teachers as uninterested and unconcerned. Most teachers noted that marginal learners lack self-esteem and motivation to achieve. Some of these learners appear anxious, exhibiting little self-control or self-discipline. However, some teachers described students who worked very hard to learn, but still failed to succeed. These students were described as defeated, having little or no confidence.

Survey responses regarding the characteristics of marginal learners included these descriptions:

Many times they are the students who really work and try, but are just unable to do the work correctly.

This is often a matter of speed. I find marginal learners are simply much slower than others.

Too often they have met failure; therefore, it seems imminent in future experiences.

They appear somewhat sad or apathetic rather than frustrated. Usually marginal learners are not a discipline problem, but they do appear to lack motivation.

This is the child with a shorter attention span (who) is usually easily distracted. In other words, they just take time and patience.

Question 2:

Why do you feel you are perceived as effective in helping marginal learners?

In their responses to this survey question, teachers focused on three areas. First, they listed personal qualities that helped them be effective teachers of marginal learners. Inseparable from these personal qualities were respondents' philosophies of education. Another major area contributing to respondents' perceived effectiveness was the use of effective instructional strategies.

Personal Qualities and Philosophy

Patient, caring, enthusiastic, friendly, loving and observant—these are terms the teachers used to describe personal and professional characteristics that made them effective in working with marginal learners. The teachers responding to the survey teach all levels, elementary to senior high, and all subjects, science to physical education.

The most pervasive theme among teacher responses was a basic belief that all students have an equal opportunity for success in learn-

ing. Many teachers stated that marginal students should be regarded as more similar to than different from other students, and that students should be "treated equally." The belief was often expressed that, given the opportunity, marginal students can learn "like other students." The teacher expectation that every student is capable of learning and that learning progress constitutes success was frequently reiterated. Many responses cited "high expectations" and "expecting success."

Defining success as progress in learning enabled these teachers to recognize and acknowledge student success in daily classroom events. Respondents often noted that the critical element in motivating marginal learners is a feeling of self-worth. This feeling is enhanced when the student successfully completes a task and when others recognize the success. Praise was mentioned as important by many teachers, usually in conjunction with student achievement.

Many teachers characterized their interaction with marginal students as a balance between persistence and patience. This balance represented the constant gentle nudge to achieve—to try in spite of the risk of failure. These teachers effective with marginal learners realized that the problem confronting them was not the difference in learning needs among marginal students, but the frustrating difficulty in adapting teaching strategies and curriculum to allow students to learn in ways that are most natural for them.

This realization provided a perceptual framework open to exploring opportunities to reach students who were not meeting the "school norms" of academic and social behaviors. Instead of focusing completely on student performance requirements, these teachers seemed to appreciate student individuality.

Instructional Strategies

Many survey responses alluded to building on students' strengths. Several respondents noted the value of observation in discovering student strengths and activities and strategies that work for specific students. Varying teaching strategies was often mentioned as a way of increasing the chances of student success in learning.

Many suggestions were made to increase student involvement for marginal learners. One teacher suggested asking questions and encouraging student questions to involve marginal learners in class discussions. Several respondents plan activities that utilize auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning modalities.

Pacing assignments to match student needs was another key instructional strategy. Assignments designed with appropriate levels of content and time allotments were considered vital to avoid boring or overwhelming tasks. One teacher recommended a self-paced math program to improve on-task behaviors of marginal learners.

All of the strategies reported by teachers surveyed reflect enthusiasm and caring. As one teacher stated,

> *I can wait a long time to see just a little progress in my students. The most important reason I feel I am effective is that no matter what, I convey to my students that I care about them and that they are important....*

This kind of caring leads teachers to monitor marginal learner progress more closely and to ask themselves what works best for each student. This kind of caring motivates teachers to invest the energy and time necessary to adapt instruction to include those strategies and materials that are most effective for marginal learners.

Five commonalities emerging from survey responses may explain why these teachers are so successful. Teachers effective with marginal learners:

1. create a positive, friendly classroom climate where students feel good about themselves;
2. hold high expectations that all students can achieve and realistic expectations for each student's achievement;
3. emphasize subject matter;
4. assess and recognize student progress regularly; and

5. are committed to instructional improvement.

In their own words, some of these teachers attributed their success to the following behaviors and beliefs:

Each student has areas of strengths for himself/herself. The degree of strength may vary, but each student has strengths.

(I) do not just "cater" to the top students, but treat all students as equals.

I have been successful with marginal learners because I believe in them. If someone takes a special interest in them, they automatically improve.

I work hard and I expect my students to work hard. I don't want to ever say that I have given up on a student.

I enjoy working with marginal students and I feel successful when they succeed.

Question 3:

How do you organize your classroom to work effectively with marginal learners?

From survey responses, it is clear that teachers who are effective with marginal learners are inventive and flexible in meeting the needs of their students in the face of the many constraints of school schedules and routines. A variety of techniques for organizing the classroom were cited that, according to respondents, proved effective with marginal learners. These included seating arrangements, instructional grouping, teacher proximity, and routine classroom procedures.

Seat Assignments

While many of the teachers maintained the traditional classroom seating arrangement, most allowed students to choose seats. If a student was unable to keep on-task or was distracted by students nearby, the teacher usually moved him or her to a less distracting location. Second and third chances were given when students demonstrated improvement in classroom behavior. Other teachers used group seating with round tables of four students and provided separate seating only for those students who were unable to stay on-task within a group. Although all teachers had a consistent daily seating arrangement, some changed the arrangement periodically to introduce some variety.

Grouping for Instruction

Many classes were already grouped according to ability, but for instruction, teachers attempted to keep grouping flexible and suited to the students' needs. Some teachers used diagnostic/prescriptive techniques with mastery tests to determine groups. However, these teachers sought student input in determining individual objectives. Other teachers utilized heterogeneous grouping, encouraging peer interaction and assistance. One teacher used data from learning style assessments to determine grouping.

Since some marginal learners, without highly structured learning tasks, tend to distract one another, some teachers preferred whole-group instruction with closely supervised individual seatwork. Other teachers reported greater comfort in working with small groups at the chalkboard, allowing the remaining students to help one another with assignments. However, respondents who used small-group instruction emphasized the need for close monitoring of the independent groups to assure that they were on-task. Some used aides or older peer tutors to assist groups.

Most respondents expressed a common concern about segregating or stigmatizing marginal learners as different from or inferior to other students. Nearly all teachers mentioned efforts to restrict ability grouping to reading and math and to strive for homogeneous groupings for instruction in other content areas. Even when grouping homogeneously, teachers took care to pair marginal learners with students who appeared to have natural helping skills. Some respondents gave consideration to special talents

of marginal learners, placing them in groups where their talents might be recognized and valued by other students.

Teacher Proximity

No matter what seating arrangements or grouping patterns the teachers chose, providing close proximity between the students and the teacher was important. Teachers consistently referred to the importance of maintaining eye contact with students to focus their attention and to monitor for understanding of concepts. Teachers also mentioned the value of standing near students and of frequent questioning in helping students remain on-task.

Classroom Procedures

Respondents described several other factors that benefited marginal learners, including room arrangements and procedures. Many teachers focused on the importance of a classroom environment free from visual and auditory distractions. Consistent routines and rules were considered to be essential in assisting marginal learners. To reduce disruptions caused by lost or forgotten pencils or paper (a frequent problem with some marginal learners), extra classroom supplies should be close at hand. One respondent contended that pull-out programs for marginal learners exacerbate student difficulty with distractions by fragmenting schedules and learning sequences.

Tips from several survey respondents regarding grouping and room arrangements include the following:

This year I have been assigning students to groups that are heterogeneous. This approach is called Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD). These students may work together; and then after each quiz and test, we determine which group improved the most from the last quiz or test. The winning group gets a small prize. The students like to choose a prize! (For further information about STAD, write: Johns Hopkins Team Learning Project Center for Social Organization of Schools, The Johns Hopkins University, 3505 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218.)

The marginal learner sits near a "buddy" to help with any individual work that may be required.

My classes are highly structured, starting the minute the bell rings, with little time for discipline problems to get out of hand.

I make every attempt to minimize visual and auditory distractions, while maintaining an interesting and pleasant atmosphere.

Question 4:

How do you organize your instructional time within state-mandated guidelines to work with marginal learners?

Although the Kentucky Department of Education guidelines specify the amount of time allotted to instruction in each content area, the teacher can organize the period to meet the needs of students.

Many teachers surveyed reported that frequent changes in activities seem to benefit marginal learners. This can be achieved by having several short time slots for each content area at different times throughout the day. Integrating subject areas was mentioned by several respondents as an effective way of reinforcing concepts through a variety of approaches.

Many survey respondents suggested dividing larger blocks of instructional time into three segments structured for review, lesson, and assignment. According to this structure, the class begins with a daily review of previously taught concepts. Following the review is a short, well-planned lesson emphasizing basic concepts. Next, the teacher explains examples and models, concluding with a practice assignment.

Many teachers reported that they set aside the last 15-20 minutes of instructional time for students to begin assignments. While the

students work, the teacher circulates, repeating, explaining, and clarifying instructions as well as checking on the progress of marginal learners.

This homework period allows the teacher the flexibility of determining which students need more attention and practice. It also allows students to do much of their work during class, with the supervision and support of the teacher and peers, assuring that they understand the work. Some teachers accommodate the needs of marginal learners by decreasing their work loads.

Many teachers reported that there is never enough time for individual student attention during instructional time. Some teachers described offering special help to students during teacher free time or planning time. Others reported developing peer tutoring or a buddy system to assist marginal learners.

Respondents' management of instructional time reflected a concern both for the efficiency of time spent on-task and the necessity of maintaining the human touch in their interactions with students. Teachers surveyed were flexible in balancing efficiency and concern in their efforts to involve marginal students in learning.

One teacher reflected the sentiments of several respondents with these words:

> *I try to meet my students' needs and if that means spending a longer time than I feel I have allotted to a certain subject, I have to put my students' needs first.*

Question 5:

What types of activities work best with marginal learners?

One of the most common themes in teacher descriptions of activities that work with marginal learners is "hands-on," concrete learning strategies. More specifically, teachers described the need for active involvement in learning using a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities. Examples of activities described were games, drawings, and illustrations of lesson content; computer tutorial programs; experiments; cut-and-paste activities; role playing situations presented in lessons; and independent and group projects.

Rather than describing specific activities, most respondents provided characteristics of effective instructional strategies for marginal learners. These characteristics are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

Providing Structure

Teachers emphasized structure in the learning activities as important to the needs of marginal learners. Respondents described structure in two dimensions. First, structure was referred to in terms of curriculum and classroom management. Teachers also referred to providing structure to students thought processes, which requires effective questioning techniques.

Structuring the learning environment. Organization and routine were considered to be essential in minimizing distractions for marginal learners. Recommendations were made to offer shorter lessons with intensive teaching of objectives and concepts, followed by reinforcement activities. Lessons, some respondents stated, need to be varied and fast-paced, but limited to one or two objectives. As one teacher put it, lessons need to be given in "short doses and lots of it."

Time and group size are other means for providing structure to the learning environment. Teacher respondents stated that students need to be given time limits for completing assignments. Groups, they advised, should be limited in size to two or three students, never more than five. This helps assure that students will remain on-task with their assignment. Respondents described marginal learners as needing close supervision in both group and independent work. Many teachers reported using adult and peer tutors to give one-on-one attention. The majority of respondents believe assignments and expectations of student behavior need to be clearly stated and consistently reinforced.

Structuring student thought processes. The second dimension of structure emphasized by teachers was the structure of thought processes. Teachers almost unanimously stressed the need for skillful questioning techniques by the

instructor to help students make connections within the content and transfer that understanding to other situations. Teachers emphasized the need to involve marginal learners in frequent discussions of subject matter, eliciting student opinions of information and suggesting applications to other contexts. One teacher asks students to explain their thinking process in arriving at conclusions and to write down the steps in problem-solving on math assignments.

Marginal learners may need assistance in grasping concepts. One respondent cautioned that it is necessary to point out important and "obvious" concepts, for they are not always so obvious to marginal learners. To accomplish this, one teacher uses what she calls "one-liners"—brief, concise explanations that build from fact to concepts. Imagery techniques are suggested by another teacher as ways to help students remember groups of facts within a concept.

Respondents felt that listening skills were particularly important for marginal learners. These successful teachers suggested that reading aloud to students often and accompanying the reading with provocative discussions of story content might enhance listening skills. For example, a science teacher presents mini-lectures followed by class discussions on segments of the text before students are asked to read it. Another teacher, who believes that phonetic approaches to reading instruction are helpful to marginal learners, suggested rhyming activities to help primary students develop listening skills.

Teachers can also help students organize their thinking through specific instruction in study skills. Suggestions were made to debrief students after a lesson by helping the class record notes on key concepts and facts, sometimes in an outline. The notes and outlines are later used by the class, under the guidance of the teacher, to review for tests.

Enhancing Affective Development

Another area of emphasis among the teachers surveyed was the affective development of marginal learners. These teachers were particularly sensitive to any practices that set marginal learners apart from their classmates. A predominant theme was that marginal learners should be included in all regular classroom activities, but the activities should be flexible enough to address the needs of all students. One teacher emphasized that, despite the need for highly structured activities, marginal learners should be given opportunities to make choices. Structure should be present in clearly defined directions and performance expectations. However, students should be allowed choices in ways they meet the requirements.

The majority of teachers stressed the idea of ensuring opportunities for success for marginal learners. This may be accomplished in two ways. First, as the suggestions for structuring lessons demonstrate, the assignments should accommodate the marginal learners' limited attention span, need for processing information through several modalities, and need for extensive practice or reinforcement. A second way teachers can help students experience success is by establishing a learning climate that enhances student self-esteem. One teacher expressed this concern by stating that she planned learning activities to encourage "laughter, acceptance, and unique responses."

Another teacher evidenced this concern in her recommendation of creative writing assignments for marginal learners that emphasize the creativity rather than the correctness of the writing. In this approach, students are able to write more freely about the subject, without concern for grammatical errors, which are corrected in later conferences. Students share their writings with the teacher and classmates, who accept without criticism the ideas of unique personal relevance to the writer. In this way, the teacher and classmates are able to affirm the writer as a person.

A first grade teacher described a "fail-safe" plan for students experiencing success. Twice a week, a fifth grade class is invited to a 15-minute visit to her class to hear her students read a selected story. Throughout the week, the teacher reads the selection to her students as they read silently from their own copies. By the time the students are ready to "perform," they are thoroughly familiar with the story. The respondent reports that the approval and recognition of fifth graders seal students' perceptions of themselves as certified successful readers.

Many teachers surveyed suggested effective instruction strategies for marginal learners. These include:

I try to ask questions which make them think. "What do you think will happen next? Why?" I think we should ask more questions where there is no obvious single answer. Teachers should have more training on how to do this. Children need to think for themselves.

Time-on-task is tailored to suit the child's attention span and is gradually increased as his ability to concentrate increases.

Asking the same question in a variety of ways is very effective for me.

Each lesson must have a variety of activities...making posters, mobiles, models, and collections are frequently used activities.

The more senses that can be involved, the better.

Question 6:

Please respond to the following categories with strategies or modifications you've found to be effective for marginal learners: concept review, questioning and reinforcement, motivation, self-esteem, discipline, evaluation, homework, outside class assistance, and parental contact.

Concept Review

Almost all respondents stated that daily review of previously learned skills is important. However, the method of review varied. Some teachers recommended straightforward question-and-answer sessions. Others favored games, crossword activities, or practice problems. Several suggested that the use of "attention getters" during instruction (e.g., color coding material, using all uppercase letters) helped with concept review. All reported that review should be conducted daily, involve small steps, stress practical life uses, and involve repetition.

Two ideas were consistently repeated: (1) the concept being reviewed must be related to something the student understands, and (2) concept review should lead naturally into a new learning experience.

Questioning and Reinforcement

Many marginal students will not or cannot tell the teacher if they understand a concept, so good questioning skills are important. As one respondent noted:

Questioning is a valuable tool both for teaching and evaluation. It reinforces skills and concepts being taught while providing the means of determining the extent to which they have been mastered.

Questioning is used effectively by many of the teachers surveyed for teaching, reinforcement, and evaluation.

Survey responses indicated that good questioning skills involve asking questions at a level the student can answer or at least partially answer correctly. The questions should be stated in a clear, concise manner and should elicit both factual and open-ended responses. Many teachers noted that too often teachers avoid asking marginal learners the "What do you think?" and "Why?" questions.

All respondents agreed that positive reinforcement was an important facet of questioning. Some suggested that each student be reinforced for answering, while others stressed that only correct or partially correct answers be reinforced.

Motivation

The old adage, "Nothing succeeds like success," seemed to be the theme for teacher solutions to student motivation. Several teach-

ers stressed positive learning experiences as integral to motivation. Designing class activities to ensure successful student completion was considered important by many teachers surveyed.

One common observation regarding motivation was that no technique worked for all students. The successful motivator was the teacher who was willing to look for innovative and different ways to reach students. Some suggestions for maximizing student motivation included praise, student interaction, individual attention from the teacher, variety in teaching methods, and incentives such as going out to eat, time out, and game time.

More than one teacher felt his/her own motivation had an effect on students. As one respondent wrote:

> *If I am motivated, then they [students] become motivated. I need to set examples, be a role model, be involved, and make learning fun and successful.*

Self-Esteem

Here, as in motivation, teacher attitudes were viewed as important. Marginal students, the respondents reported, show highest self-esteem when teachers praise good behavior; show love, respect, and concern; give as much individual attention as possible; and establish positive relationships with students.

Successful learning experiences were also noted as important to developing student self-esteem. According to one respondent:

> *Because lessons are commensurate with the child's ability level, success is ensured; and with success comes improved self-esteem.*

Another respondent pointed out the importance of teacher expectations to this success:

> *Never in any way let these students sense that you expect less from them. Stress their successes.*

Discipline

Well-designed classroom activities and busy, involved students were listed by respondents as important to good classroom discipline. In addition, the following three factors were common to successful discipline programs:

1. Rules are simple, well-defined, and understood by the students. Respondents suggested posting rules in the classroom to assure that students knew what was expected. Since students generally perform as expected, respondents further recommended expecting students to behave properly.

2. All rules are enforced with consistency and fairness. Keeping records helped respondents achieve this.

3. Students are positively reinforced for appropriate behaviors. Respondents specifically warned against embarrassing students as a means of control, the antithesis of this third point.

Evaluation

Respondents stressed that evaluation should be an ongoing process involving many different activities (e.g., daily tasks, six-week exams, oral and written tests, pretests, homework, workbooks, and projects).

Several teachers suggested daily quizzes with oral as well as written components. Giving daily quizzes that involved breaking large amounts of information into smaller, more easily processed portions was advocated. Marginal learners tend, in the view of these teachers, to perform better on tests covering a limited amount of information. Oral tests with students replying to thought questions such as "how" and "why" were popular with respondents, because many marginal learners have difficulty expressing themselves in writing.

Since many marginal learners have developed a degree of test anxiety over the years,

many respondents recommended using daily student performance and homework grades as a significant part of evaluation. Extra credit assignments were also recommended for those who have difficulty performing well on paper-and-pencil tests. Respondents prepared these extra credit assignments as valid learning experiences, not as giveaways.

Homework

Repetition has a place in the development of learning activities, but the majority of respondents were against long, highly repetitive homework assignments. Most teachers recommended a few well-designed questions, to be worked in class under qualified direction. Many recommended that when homework was assigned, it should consist of a fairly short number of problems on areas well-understood by the student. Another suggestion was that homework should be collected and reviewed promptly, with students having the opportunity to correct or at least understand their mistakes.

Outside Class Assistance

Many of these teachers of marginal learners reported assisting students before and after school. Others described using a peer tutoring process designed to provide the marginal learner with immediate feedback and help. Some teachers recommended parental help. Group activities involving marginal learners working with academically advanced students were seen as effective if properly designed.

Parental Contact

Parent-teacher conferences, deficiency reports, and homework signed by parents and returned were all recommended as effective ways to contact parents. The teachers advised that parental contact be as positive as the circumstance warrants and that parents be contacted when a student does well, not just when a problem exists.

Question 7:

What, in your opinion, is most important in working with marginal learners?

When asked to condense their convictions about effectiveness in teaching marginal learners to one crucial factor, the majority of teachers described a personal quality of teachers—caring. Using such words as patience, persistence, respect, and sincerity, teacher responses outlined the profile of a personally involved teacher who "connects" with students alienated from learning and school.

Responses targeted low self-esteem as a problem of marginal learners that interfered with learning. The consensus of respondents was that positive self-esteem derived from achievement. Teachers repeatedly wrote of the need for students to experience success in school. They described their strong belief that success was not only possible, but an inherent right of every student. Acting on their beliefs, respondents implemented many instructional and classroom management techniques effective with marginal learners.

Designing learning activities that matched student ability was considered by many respondents as vital to student success. According to one respondent, key concerns included:

> *Understanding and accepting needs and feelings of the children and making a real effort to try to provide learning experiences on a level that permits each child to feel successful.*

A structured, yet flexible approach to individual student needs by other respondents was stressed. In reference to student encouragement, verbal praise was mentioned often. However, respondents cautioned that praise should be based on actual student successes.

Three responses from teachers identified as effective with marginal learners best summarized the caring needed:

> *A patient, caring teacher is the biggest asset for a class of marginal learners.*

Patience—making it possible for them to succeed while involving them in the class.

The most important thing in working with marginal learners is adjusting the learning activities to the ability level of the students; to make them just low enough to ensure success, but high enough to offer a challenge.

Conclusion

In reviewing the responses of teachers identified as successful with marginal learners, the reader discovers no new strategies, formulas, or "pat" answers. The suggestions included in this publication would be advantageous to any student in any classroom. However, what sets these effective teachers apart is their willingness and determination to go the "extra mile" in helping all students realize success.

The stress and energy required to assist the students who often resist help is poignantly expressed in this teacher's reflection:

> *I try not to get frustrated and gripe and complain. Being positive makes you appear more successful—I think. I do have one complaint. The more successful you are, the more you have troubled children recommended. I feel I've gotten more than my share of the more severe problems. I thank God I've been able to handle it so far, but I worry about burnout. Will I hold out gracefully until retirement?*

Teaching individual students so that each can learn is hard work. It requires teachers to be open to change, to challenge standard practices, and to seek out what works for each student. These teachers, recognized as effective with marginal learners, identified specific practices that work with their marginal learners. The practices described meet students halfway in offering opportunities for learning that are challenging and possible.

As trends toward more mainstreaming continue, more teachers will be confronted with the frustration of students who require extra thought and effort to learn in the classroom. The authors expect that *Drawing Marginal Learners Into the Big Picture* will encourage readers to make the necessary changes to include marginal learners in the learning process.

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Appendices

Appendix A

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Appendix B

1988 KEA-AEL Study Group
Effective Strategies for Marginal Learners Survey

1988 KEA-AEL Study Group
Effective Strategies for Marginal Learners

SURVEY

Please read all seven (7) questions before writing or typing your responses. Use additional pages to number and continue any response.

1. Imagine a marginal learner in your class. What characteristics make him or her marginal?

2. Why do you feel you are perceived as effective in helping marginal learners?

3. How do you organize your classroom to work effectively with marginal learners (e.g., changes in room arrangement, grouping, etc.)?

4. How do you organize your instructional time within state-mandated guidelines to work effectively with marginal learners?

5. What types of activities seem to work best with marginal learners?

6. Please respond to the following categories with strategies or modifications you've found to be effective for marginal learners:

concept review:

questioning and reinforcement:

motivation:

self-esteem:

discipline:

evaluation (e.g., extra credit, more frequent or shorter quizzes, etc.):

homework:

outside class assistance by you or others:

parental contact (e.g., deficiency notices, progress reports, midterm reports, etc.):

7. What, in your opinion, is most important in working with marginal learners?

Please attach, for possible inclusion in the publication, a one-two page description of an activity you've found to be effective with marginal learners.

Please return this form and any additional pages in the enclosed, stamped envelope by ***April 8***. Thank you for your assistance. Watch for the publication to be distributed by KEA and AEL.

Appendix C

Teacher-Tested Techniques for Helping Marginal Learners Succeed

DICTATION COLOR TRACE

anonymous contribution

"Dictation Color Trace" develops student skills. The technique works well with students 10 and under, and can be used as an alternative to the commonly used sandpaper tracing. "Dictation Color Trace" adds variety to reinforcing activities in vocabulary development and requires commonly available supplies. It also reinforces listening skills and provides practice for gross and fine-motor coordination.

MATERIALS: Paper, a large crayon, and a pencil

PROCEDURE: After each child is given paper, crayon, and pencil, the teacher begins by dictating the spelling of a word—letter-by-letter initially, and syllable-by-syllable as the students are ready. As the teacher dictates, the students write one-inch letters with their pencils.

Next, the teacher spells the word aloud while writing it on the chalkboard. The students then check their work against the chalkboard model, making corrections. Using their crayons, students then color trace over the penciled word twice as they spell it aloud and pronounce the word in unison.

Following this activity the teacher proceeds with the remainder of the vocabulary lesson using definitions, structural analysis, sample sentences, and general discussion of the word.

ROCKS

anonymous contribution

"Rocks" can be used in science classes to simulate the texture and composition of igneous rocks. It is designed as a teacher demonstration.

MATERIALS: 2 cups sugar, 3/4 cup milk, 2 squares of chocolate, 2 tablespoons of light corn syrup, 2 tablespoons butter, bowl, spoon, cup, two aluminum pans, pot for cooking, hot plate, candy thermometer (optional).

PROCEDURE:

1. Cook 2 cups of sugar, 3/4 cup milk, 2 squares of chocolate, and 2 tablespoons of light corn syrup slowly in a large pot on the hot plate until the chocolate melts, stirring gently.

2. Boil without stirring to 112 degrees Centigrade (234 degrees Fahrenheit) or until a small amount of the mixture forms a soft ball when dropped into cold water.

3. Remove the mixture from heat, add 2 tablespoons of butter, and let stand until cool.

4. Pour half of the mixture into an aluminum pan and let stand.

5. Pour the other half into a bowl and beat until thick. Pour this mixture into another aluminum pan and refrigerate until hardened.

6. Compare the textures of the two batches of fudge:

   Which one has larger grains?
   What does the size of the grains depend upon?
   Which is similar to fine-grained igneous rock?
   How are igneous rocks classified?
   Name some coarse-grained igneous rocks.
   Name some fine-grained igneous rocks.

On a chart, chalkboard, or overhead transparency with whole-class discussion, compose the following chart:

Results:

Conclusions:

The results may be eaten!

BEGINNING SOUNDS—OPERATIONALLY DEFINED

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Maysville, KY 41056

This activity helps students who have difficulty hearing or understanding beginning sounds. If first grade students can master 75% of the consonant sounds in the first two months of school, they are well on their way to completing the basal reading series by the end of the year. They have a tool to use to decode words, as opposed to word recognition, context clues, and guessing. Once the beginning consonants are learned, few students have problems transferring the sounds to the end of the word and distinguishing the ending sounds. Vowel study should begin immediately after the consonants are learned.

MATERIALS: A collection of picture cards beginning with each consonant sound—several for each consonant.

PROCEDURE: Hold up two cards, one beginning with one sound, and the other beginning with another sound. Introduce the activity as playing a game in which you are a baby and you can't talk very well. You can't say the whole word, but you can make the first sound. You then make the first sound of one object on a displayed card and the children guess which of the two objects you are trying to say.

Next, give the children a worksheet that includes several items with and without the sound for the day. You continue your "baby sound" and see if the children can circle what you are trying to say. Ask, "Can you find what the baby wants?"

Introduce the letter for that sound. Say something like, "I have been making the same sound over and over in this lesson. Can you make that sound? We have a special letter for that sound—it is called "a".

After practicing writing the letter, the students write the letter beside pictures of objects that begin with that sound.

This activity is used to supplement the basal series readiness textbook. For this activity, you may purchase a beginning consonant workbook and a clear plastic theme holder for each student. As each sound is introduced, students may insert the appropriate worksheet in the plastic holder and mark their answers on the plastic with water-based markers. After the lesson, students wipe the plastic clean for later use.

TEAMS-GAMES-TOURNAMENTS

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Russell Middle School
Box S
Russell, KY 41169

"Teams-Games-Tournaments," a cooperative learning method developed at the Center for Social Organization of Schools, The Johns Hopkins University, has been very effective with marginal learners.

The method is designed to be used with either a heterogeneous or homogeneous class, and students of all ability levels can be involved simultaneously. The following is a description of the method.

The class is divided into teams with four members per team. Each team consists of one high-ability student, two average-ability students, and one low-ability student. (Group composition may vary but should be heterogenous in ability levels of students. Pretests should be given to determine the areas of skill strengths and weaknesses.) Based on pretest results, each member of the team is placed in an individualized program, which may be teacher-designed. Team members help each other, and the teacher assists when there is a need. Mastery of skills is determined by a posttest. In order for a team to win the competition, each team member must achieve at a predetermined level.

I have found grades to improve dramatically through the use of "Teams-Games-Tournaments." As a result of this success, students become more confident, and feelings of self-esteem are increased.

Two resources with more complete instructions for this model and other cooperative learning strategies are listed below:

Slavin, R. (1982). *Cooperative learning: Student teams.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Slavin, R. (1988). *Student team learning: An overview and practical guide.* Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 295 910). To order ERIC documents, you may write ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22304-6409, or phone (800) 227-3742.

BE ON TIME

Martha Proctor
Nelson County High School
Route 1
Bardstown, KY 40004

"Be on Time" may be used to help students become aware of the rewards of being on time and doing good work on the job (the classroom). After a two-week trial of this activity, the author noted that most students participated and many improved their behavior and performance in class. Because it is important to daily return scores on work, this activity may work best for small groups.

MATERIALS: Time clock, cards, and a rack for cards.

PROCEDURE: Each student is given a time card and instructed to clock in before the bell rings each morning and clock out before leaving class.

Student scores on classwork are checked daily and recorded by students on their time cards. Also recorded are incidents of tardiness and misbehavior.

At the end of the week, students receive a "paycheck." Students are "paid" one dollar for every point they score on class work. They are docked a five-dollar penalty for tardiness and misbehavior, as well as a two-dollar penalty for not having pencil and paper. Students with the highest "paycheck" receive actual money for a soft drink.

The "paychecks" were also used as part of a unit on banking to learn about endorsing and depositing checks.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TIPS

Mary Ann Bugg
Caldwell County Middle School
612 W. Washington
Princeton, KY 42445

CLASSROOM RULES

1. BE PREPARED FOR CLASS. (Be seated in assigned seat with pencil, paper, book, and assignment when tardy bell rings.)
2. TALKING IS ALLOWED DURING LAST 10 MINUTES OF CLASS. (Homework average must be above 70%.)
3. CHEWING GUM IS ALLOWED IF IT IS NOT SEEN, HEARD, OR FOUND.
4. TWO SIGN-OUTS FROM A CLASS ARE ALLOWED EACH MONTH.
5. WORK WITHOUT DISTURBING THE WORK OF OTHERS.

DUTIES OF STUDENT HELPERS

1. Take attendance. Mark absences with a slash "/" in the appropriate space.
2. Record tardiness for students who enter the room after the tardy bell. Place a "T" in the appropriate space.
3. Record sign-outs by writing the date in either of the sign-out spaces. The teacher has to approve any borrowing from the next month.
4. Return to students any papers in the folder.
5. Write the names of absent students on any handouts and place them in the folder.
6. Check absences with the office absentee sheet. Report to the teacher any name not appearing on the sheet.
7. Act as host or hostess to visitors.
8. Monitor the class when teacher leaves the room or is called to the door by a visitor.

(see Student Helper Checksheet on next page)

PERIOD: _____ MATH

MONTH: JANUARY

(alphabetic) STUDENT NAME	WENDY					CHRISTY					KURT					JASON					TOTAL ABSENCE	SIGNOUTS
	5	6	7	8	9	12	13	14	15	16	19	20	21	22	23	26	27	28	29	30		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		
1. Christy Asher																						
2. Kurt Burris							/	/													5	8
3. Jason Bramblett																						
4. Tonya Carter													/								9	
5.																						
6.																						
7.																						
8.																						
9.																						
10.																						
11.																						
12.																						
13.																						
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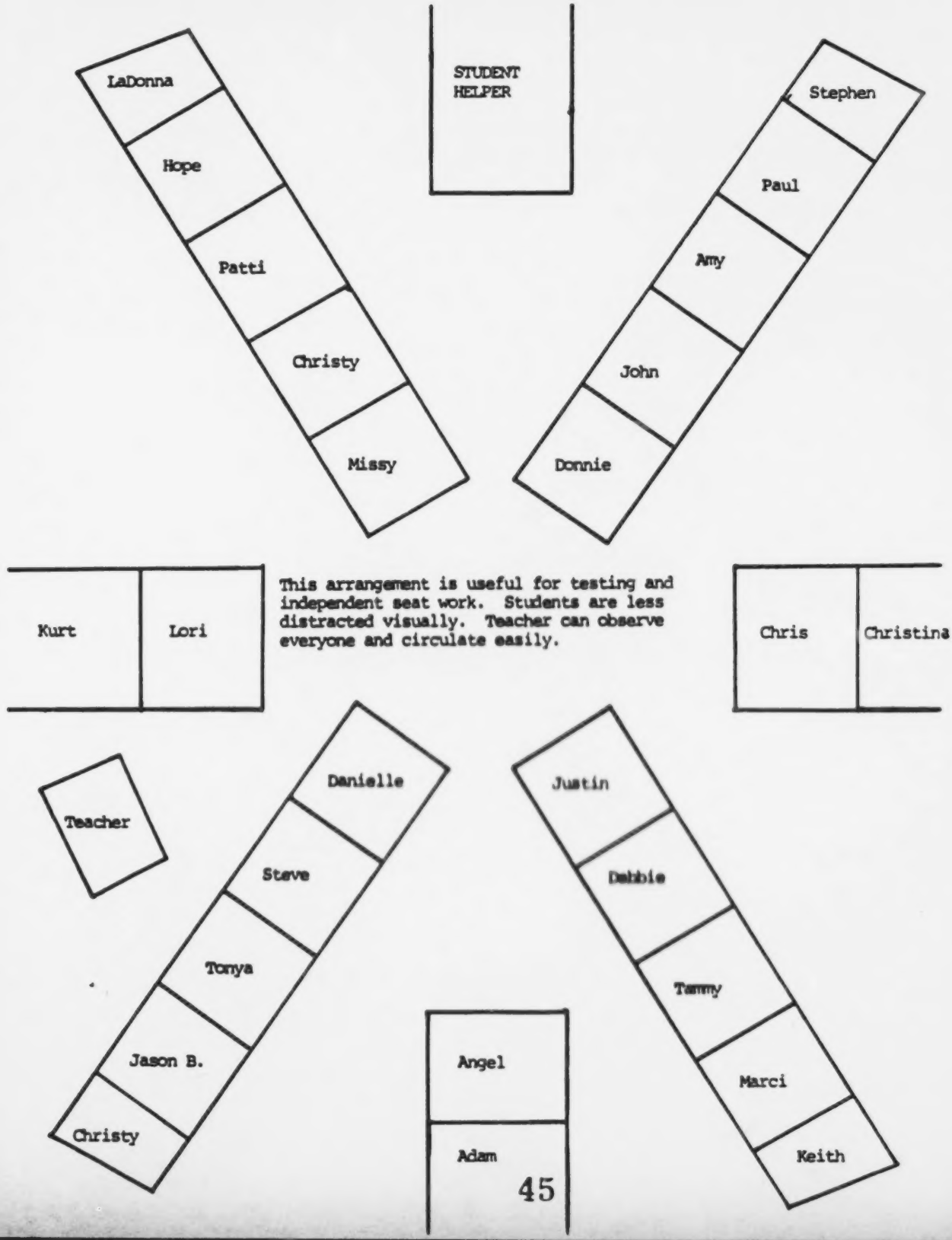
31.																						
32.																						
33.																						
34.																						
35.																						

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____ TOTAL

SEATING ARRANGEMENT

Mary Ann Bugg
Caldwell Middle School
612 W. Washington
Princeton, KY 42445

This arrangement is useful for testing and independent seat work. Students are less distracted visually. The teacher can observe everyone and circulate easily.


STUDENT HELPER
LaDonna
Hope
Patti
Christy
Missy
Stephen
Paul
Amy
John
Donnie
Kurt
Lori
This arrangement is useful for testing and independent seat work. Students are less distracted visually. Teacher can observe everyone and circulate easily.
Chris
Christina
Teacher
Danielle
Steve
Tonya
Jason B.
Christy
Justin
Debbie
Tammy
Marci
Keith
Angel
Adam

HELPFUL STRATEGIES FOR MARGINAL LEARNERS

Renee Schroering
Mt. Washington Elementary School
Highway 44
Mt. Washington, KY 40047

Questioning and Reinforcement

Allow at least 10 seconds for the student to answer after a question is asked. If the student repeats the question without answering, reinforce the oral responses anyway.

Example:

Teacher: Who owned Texas before Texas joined the United States?...John?

John: Texas was owned by...by... (After waiting 10 seconds and John doesn't give an answer, the teacher responds.)

Teacher: John, can you call on someone who can help you with the answer? (After John calls on someone who then gives the correct answer, the teacher responds.)

John, can you tell Suzie who owned Texas before it joined the United States?

Computer Use in Creative Writing

This activity is helpful in building student self-esteem.

An adult types as the student dictates a story. The student then edits the copy from the computer printout. Themes focus on the student—hobbies, interests, etc. Near the end of the year, each student writes an autobiography complete with illustrations.

Recognition of Good Work

To build student self-esteem, it is occasionally helpful to post student photographs in the halls with examples of their best work posted beneath.

MEDIA MOTIVATORS

Ruth Ann Morman
Cannonsburg Elementary School
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Ashland, KY 41101

Newscasts

By second semester, fourth grade students can take responsibility for a classroom newscast each morning during opening exercises. A simple basic format for the newscast is to have the student newscaster present some current news event, some information on sports, and the weather forecast. The newscast is followed by a brief classroom discussion.

Newspapers

A subscription is made for each student to receive the newspaper one day a week for 4-6 weeks. On that day, time is scheduled for newspaper reading and related activities.

The weather map can be used in interpretation activities and averaging temperatures for the week or month. Comparisons can be made to other time periods.

Using the "Lifestyles" or similar human interest section and the grocery advertisements, students can plan menus and purchases according to a given budget. The classified section may be used to develop concrete math problems for the students.

Advertisements provide a wealth of material for the study of adjectives. One activity students particularly enjoy is to create a collage of adjectives describing the.. selves.

During the newspaper subscription period, a trip to a newspaper office and printing department can be planned where students can learn how a newspaper is produced. Also, students can learn some basic elements of advertising.

Following the newspaper visit, students can publish their own newspaper for distribution among same grade levels or for the school. This is best accomplished in small groups that are assigned particular writing topics.

TWO SUCCESSFUL ACTIVITIES FOR MARGINAL LEARNERS

Margaret Crawford
Auburn Elementary School
221 College Street
Auburn, KY 42206

Homework Meeting

Homework is graded and returned to students as quickly as possible. Each morning begins with the Homework Meeting. After the homework is passed out, students who have made good scores or raised their scores are recognized with applause from the class and congratulations from the teacher. This recognition is very motivating.

Students who are having difficulty present their problems to the class. Classmates then offer suggestions for improvement that are usually very practical, down-to-earth, and helpful.

Good News

After reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and singing the National Anthem, students are encouraged to stand and share with the class any good news about themselves and/or their family. This gives the students confidence in speaking before the class and helps them appreciate their own uniqueness and that of their family.

POETIC PERKS FOR MARGINAL LEARNERS

Alice Lee
Caverna High School
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Horse Cave, KY 42749

Cinquains

Students enjoy writing cinquains, five-line stanzas, for holiday cards for family and friends. Begin by introducing the form of cinquains and review examples. One pattern for cinquains is:

Line 1 A one-word subject or idea
Line 2 Two adjectives describing the subject
Line 3 Three verbs showing action related to the subject
Line 4 Three or four words giving your personal reaction to the subject
Line 5 A one-word synonym for the subject

Next, brainstorm for possible words relating to the holiday or card recipient and list them randomly on the chalkboard. After compiling an extensive list of words, begin categorizing them according to number of syllables, so that students can see where they can be used in the cinquain. An enlarged student photograph on the cards is a great hit with parents.

Example: (Memorial Day)
Heroes
Courage, Valor
Fighting, Dying, Moldering
Lives gone but never forgotten
Soldiers

Acrostic Poetry

Spelling words can be used for this form of creative writing in which the first letters or last letters of the lines taken in sequence form a word or phrase. Students write the word in vertical form on the left sides of their papers. Using each letter as the first letter of a phrase, they compose a phrase describing the vertical word. Names of holidays are also good for this form.

Examples from students at Caverna High School:

Good
At
Doing things
Get some tools,
Easy things
To work with

Lori Greene

Great
Astonishing!
Does almost anything
Gets batteries
Eats batteries
Then takes new ones.

Kevin Claywell

CLASSWORK ORGANIZATION AND VOCABULARY TIPS

Mary Bellairs
Bellevue Elementary School
Bellevue Drive
Richmond, KY 40475

These suggestions have proven to be helpful for students who come to a resource room for instruction. Preparing daily work folders for each student can be extremely valuable in keeping them on-task during the class period. As the students work on the assignments in their folders, the teacher and aide circulate around the classroom, making sure students understand their assignment and offering any necessary clarification. Students also read aloud the word cards from their vocabulary lesson. Any incomplete worksheet is continued the next day. However, students are encouraged through extrinsic rewards and verbal praise and encouragement to complete as much work as possible during the time allotted. Small groups of students also work at the chalkboard on reinforcement activities.

Assignments in the folders are selected on the basis of a pretest and are developmentally sequenced. Students who need help in math use assignment sheets in conjunction with audiotapes of math facts.

Another successful strategy is the use of word cards to build the students' vocabularies. Individual word cards are placed in the students' folders, which they study with a peer or parent and recite daily in class. The student must be able to read each word correctly on three consecutive days for it to be considered learned. On the third day, the learned words are placed in each student's can of vocabulary words. Seeing the cans fill up with word cards is very motivating for the students.

After several months, when the cans are full, the students alphabetize the learned words and say each word as the teacher records them. Any words the student cannot read are returned to the can for further practice, and the list of alphabetized words is taken home to the parents. The teacher files the student-dictated list of known words for progress records.

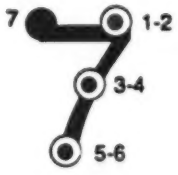
TOUCH POINT MATH, KINESTHETIC REINFORCEMENT IN LEARNING CONCEPTS

Tonya Evans
McDowell Elementary School
McDowell, KY 41647

This system uses dots on numerals as visual cues to help students remember the number and its value. Kinesthetic cues are also employed as the student touches the dots while counting. Skills and concepts are taught in a game format that involves storytelling, fast pacing, and movement. Many concrete objects are used in demonstrations and practice sessions.

The system uses dots on numerals which are touched while students count aloud to help students visualize the number and its value. For example, the numeral five has five touch points (example 1) and the numeral seven has seven touch points (example 2).

Example 1



Example 2

Notice in Example 2 the circles with dots in the center. In counting, the student touches the circle as one count and the dot as the second count. As students begin to learn the points, they can stand and use karate punches, punching the final touch point in the "nose." After the students learn the touch points for each numeral, they use them in learning the operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

Using physical exercise in lessons is very effective with marginal learners. In practicing math problems on the board, the students with correct answers get to lead the class in a few physical exercises. This is a great motivator for marginal learners, because they are often very confident in their physical skills and get to "shine" as leaders.

In teaching renaming or "carrying" in addition, the following story approach is effective with many students. Explain that they cannot park two cars in a one-car garage (ones column). Therefore, they must move extra sets of ten to the tens column and circle them so they won't forget to pick up their car. Remind them that they will have to walk home if they forget to pick up their car.

At the beginning of the year, to prepare them for subtraction, students can begin learning to count backward from 18. As they count backward, students bounce on their toes on the cue, "Bounce like a bouncing ball."

Renaming or "borrowing" can also be explained with a story format. Ask the students what they would do if they wanted to bake a cake, but did not have enough sugar. They would go next door and borrow a cup of sugar. In the same way, if they need more ones for subtraction, they can go to the tens column and borrow a set of ten ones.

To prepare them for multiplication, students learn the sequence of products of a given number (times table), using touch points on a picture poster, similar to the procedure for learning numerals. A hopscotch game can be used to teach products of a number. After chalking a standard hopscotch pattern on the sidewalk or playground, write the sequence of products for a

particular number in the squares. As students hop to the square where their marker has landed, they call out the product sequences. Use wrapped candy or pennies for markers, which they may keep.

Introduce the concept of division by using candy bars and cutting them into fractional parts, asking students such questions as, "How many people will get a piece if I cut it in thirds?" or "Would you prefer to have a third or a fourth?" Discuss with the children that the more something is divided, the smaller the parts.

Students consider such math activities to be fun and look forward to math class. For further information on Touch Point Math, you may write Touch Learning Concepts, Inc., P.O. Box 7402, Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7402 or phone 303/685-1846.

FAIR PLAY, A PERSONAL VIEW

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It has been my experience that learning takes place more effectively when no differences or special arrangements are made for a particular group. Children often have a rigid sense of fair play and expect equal treatment. When special grouping arrangements have been made and equipment and programs provided for a particular group, these children begin to expect VIP treatment in other areas. Also, children who do not participate in these activities feel left out and resent it. Thus, more problems can be created than are solved. Other than tailoring the learning activities to the needs and abilities of the learners, I make a conscientious effort to treat all children the same. This creates a more harmonious learning atmosphere in which learning takes place more effectively.

A FINAL NOTE

Marcy Lynn Armstrong
Jessamine County Middle School
Route 4
Nicholasville, KY 40356

The following comments are included as concluding remarks to this section on effective activities, for they reflect the view of many teachers that strategies chosen by effective teachers of marginal students are an inherent outgrowth of a basic personal philosophy about the nature of young people and learning. The author speaks for those who would say, "Strategies are great, but...."

I have thought and thought about an activity that I have found to be effective with marginal learners. Unfortunately, I do not have one such activity that I can put on paper for duplication.

At the beginning of the year, I begin to build rapport with each child. I am always looking for that "underdog" whom everyone else has overlooked or passed by in the past. Rapport is not something everyone can establish with children.

It seems that the children, especially marginal learners, sense that I am genuine in my feelings toward them and open up to me rather easily. I simply cannot say, "Follow steps 1,2, and 3, and you'll succeed."

I have a lot of faith that no matter how low academically or socially (each student appears currently), each has the potential to become something. I convey this to the children by being transparent with my children! I'm up-front and honest and, believe it or not, they can tell this. That's why when I tell them I believe in them, I cannot be dishonest! They know!

I "pump" a lot of praise and encouragement into these children. I also try to provide opportunities for them to experience some type of success. Many of these children do not feel good about themselves. I try my hardest to change this.

I give my children respect as if they were adults. I treat each not only as a student but as a friend. There is a difficult and fine line here, and I have seen this (method) turn out to be disastrous for some people.

I enjoy what I do, and the children know it. In filling out this survey, I have taken a close look at my philosophy and personal goals that I set for myself upon college graduation. I am happy to say that I am meeting my goals and would not change my philosophy. I am meeting children wherever they are academically, socially, psychologically, and physically. I encourage them to grow and challenge them to do only their best.